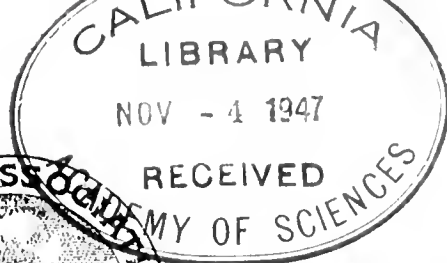


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Problems of A City Bird Refuge Manager

When asked to contribute something on the Lake Merritt Waterfowl Refuge the writer at first planned to give such facts and events as population figures, dates of outstanding observations, and other records. Then it occurred to him that much of this data may be found in back numbers of the Gull or recorded elsewhere, and that it might be more entertaining reading if he were to describe some of the problems encountered in operating a waterfowl refuge in a city park.

Audubon members and other confirmed bird students who occasionally visit the Refuge to study wild birds are not always aware of the many other types of people who visit the place for other motives. The average visitor comes merely to see and to feed, or brings the children to give them cheap, safe and healthful recreation. Pigeons, tame Mallards, or even English Sparrows and Brewer Blackbirds serve this purpose almost as well as the more aristocratic Pintails and Widgeons. If a lecturer is present to point out the many species and plumages in the mass of fowl the visitor is surprised or even thrilled. But in spring, when all these wild species take wing in spite of protection and abundant food, appreciation of the faithful resident birds increases immeasurably.

The regal Mute Swans, in spite of their bitter feuds and family failures, have long been one of the outstanding attractions of the Lake. A naturalist or city official who didn't recognize their educational and entertainment value would indeed be indifferent to public opinion. They must be granted a permanent place in the colony, in spite of their shady past record, which includes even murders of their own kind, of hapless Whistling Swan cripples introduced by man, and numerous "escapes" to distant portions of the Eastbay. Actual nesting records of our Mute Swans reveal many interesting facts, such as the forty to forty-two days of incubation required and the frequent relief by the male in incubation duty.

Predator control in and around the Refuge is essential for the protection of the young Mallards. Suppression of rats was well in hand this past season, but it soon became evident that certain birds of predatory instincts might take most of the duckling hatch. These confirmed duckling eaters were the lingering Glaucous-winged Gulls and the Black-crowned Night Herons from the Duck Island Colony. Rather than seek permits and use firearms to

remove these predators the writer endeavored to round up all duckling broods soon after hatching. This meant use of a rowboat to herd them ashore and help from gardeners to drive them into pens. As Mallards were hatching almost daily from April through July all around the Lake this roundup required much time, not to mention care of the broods thus penned up. In the pens many were afflicted with a strange malady that not even veterinary scientists could diagnose. Next year new rat-bird-burglar proof pens with running water and elevated floors will be tried out as duckling nurseries.

While functioning as nurse-maid and protector for the Mallards, in addition to serving the public in other capacities, it is disconcerting to receive insistent summons from irate citizens who have seen gulls gobble ducklings or believe certain unhappy duck triangles should be broken up. At such times it is generally difficult to explain the balance of nature and laws of survival to these people.

Nevertheless, the writer has learned many interesting facts during this intimate relationship with the common Mallards. Among these are: utter indifference of many females in placing nests close to paths, buildings or doorways; occasional fatal errors such as nesting in moored boats from which young could not escape; tendency of females to combine families and adopt orphans; and instinctive diving of even newly-hatched ducklings when hard pressed on the water. These deep-diving ducklings could invariably be exhausted after a few forced dives and could then be picked up on the surface. Adult Mallards have been seen to dive shallowly only when bathing or sporting in the water. Incidentally, during feeding of diving ducks at the Embarcadero in past years some adult Pintails were seen diving after the grain.

Perhaps an even greater disappointment than the untimely death of the only two cygnets hatched in the past season, was the failure of the Canada Geese to hatch eggs laid on Duck Island. Following desertion of their first nest and four eggs soon after its discovery, visits to the Island were discontinued for about two weeks. Then a second nest with eggs was found, but this, too, was soon deserted by the extremely wary birds. This behavior was strange in view of their customary boldness and habit of feeding from the hand. Canada Geese did nest and rear young on the island many years ago.

Some bird students have recently complained about absence since the war of the log boom which formerly closed the northeast arm of the Lake every winter to boating. On the recommendation of the writer, and at considerable expense to the Park Department, new materials have been secured and at this writing a new boom is under construction.

The past introduction of clipped or pinioned birds of such species as Wood Duck, Gadwall, Shoveller, teal and native geese which do not regularly visit the Lake has been criticized by some sentimental bird lovers. These birds were introduced to complete our living collection of common California game waterfowl and to educate sportsmen as well as others, thereby reducing mistaken identities and reckless shooting. Besides serving such ends and for general education these resident birds often attract some of their wild relatives to the comparative safety of our Refuge. At this writing these introduced natives

stand at: four Canada Geese, four Cackling Geese, five Lesser Snow Geese, one Ross Goose, four White-fronted Geese, one male Wood Duck and one male Redhead Duck.

A new directory of the "Waterfowl of Lake Merritt" in the more pretentious form of a twenty page booklet containing photographs and a map of the Lake and environs was recently introduced to the public. Scientific bird students inspecting this publication should bear in mind that it is primarily designed for the layman rather than the professional. From past experience the writer can predict that some of the species treated are quite sure to change their status at the Refuge from that assigned them on this list. On October 1st, one week after publication of this booklet, Mr. Harry Adamson reported the presence of two Holboell Grebes, formerly amongst the very rarest visitants to the Lake!

— Paul F. Covel, *Ranger Naturalist, Oakland Park Department.*

Observations

Edited by JUNE W. KELLY

Fox and Golden-crowned Sparrows, September 27; El Sobrante, Contra Costa Co., W. W. Bradley.

Hooded Oriole, June 1, 8, & 11, Chico, Calif., Gordon L. Bolander.

2 Lesser Yellow-legs, 3 Red Phalaropes, August 15, Bay Farm Island, Alameda, Mrs. Vee Curtis.

Pair of Wood Ducks, October 2, Middle Lake of Chain of Lakes, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, Mrs. June W. Kelly.

20 Avocets, October 6; 12 Avocets, October 7; 18 Killdeer, October 8; K. R. E. Pool, Berkeley, Herman V. Leffler.

2 American Widgeon, 1 Red Phalarope, September 9; 1 pair of Wood Ducks, October 3, Fine Arts Lagoon, San Francisco, E. A. Mayers.

3 Arizona Hooded Orioles, August 18, Oakland, Miss Amy Rinehart.

Note: The account of the October field trip will appear in the next issue of *The Gull*.

October Meeting

The 361st meeting of the Audubon Association of the Pacific was opened in the Assembly Room of the San Francisco Public Library at 8:00 p. m. on October 9, 1947 by the President, Dr. T. Eric Reynolds.

Mrs. June W. Kelly reported that other clubs across the nation had dues from \$1.00 to \$2.00, and thought it a mistake for us to raise our dues to \$3.50 a year. After some discussion, Miss Fay made a motion, which was seconded, to appoint a committee to investigate the membership dues of organization issuing publications similar to "The Gull".

Dr. Reynolds told of the Directors Meeting at his home on September 16. The matter of affiliation with the National Audubon Association was discuss-

ed. It was decided to hold an open discussion for six months and then put the matter to a vote.

It was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting.

Field observations were given by some of the members.
Dr. Robert T. Orr, Curator of the Department of Birds and Mammals of the California Academy of Sciences gave a very interesting and informative lecture on "Plumage Changes in Birds". The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p. m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Rinehart, *Recording Secretary*.

November Field Trip

A long hike (6 miles, round trip) on November 16th to Rodeo Lagoon (Marin County). Buy a round trip ticket for the Greyhound bus to Sausalito. Board the bus at 7th and Mission at 8:25 a. m. Get off about 100 yards from the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Cross the highway to the entrance of the military reservation. The party will proceed, under the direction of the leaders, toward, but not to, Point Bonita. The party must keep together in entering and leaving the reservation. Bring binoculars and luncheon. No cameras permitted. This should be a fine shore-

bird trip. Leaders, Jean Dubois and Arthur H. Myer.

November Meeting

The 362nd meeting of the Audubon Association of the Pacific will be held on Thursday, November 13, 1947, at 8:00 p. m. in the Assembly Room of the San Francisco Public Library at Larkin and McAllister Streets.
Miss Jacqueline Watkins will show film depicting activities at the National Audubon Society's Nature Camp in Maine. Mrs. Alma Stultz of L. A. Audubon Society will tell of the growth and activities of their society since becoming a branch of the national organization.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

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Monthly meetings second Thursday, 8:00 p. m.		
Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Sts., San Francisco		
Membership dues, payable January 1st, \$3.00 per year		
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